WIND BELLS OF SUMMER

Leone Scott

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To a Dreamer
Along the Highway

WINDBELLS OF SUMMER

"In the sound of bells you will find every word and every name that you choose to imagine."

—LEONARDO.

I

Windbells of Summer

I

IT is a summer day that boasts of blue skies and slow moving clouds. Up in a balcony with broad eaves, I may swing high, or swing low, as my fancy pleases. Swinging low with the breeze, I watch a bit of the river, through the white arch of the long bridge, spanning the valley. It glistens into the green shadows. The water-drops rise to meet the kiss of the sunbeams, and the hours of day lose their count.

Out in the branches of trees, the birds are bewitched by some new theme of elysium. They flaunt their bright feather-tips in arrant oblivion. Bird and mate fly near, and trill their scornful mockery. Two chirping things find happiness, and I, seeking the unattainable, follow the lure of poets and fools, and search the far-away castle of dreams, at the rainbow's furthermost end.

They flit about, a law unto themselves; content with the delusion of that which is beyond a

world grasp, they continue to chatter in their incessant jargon, as if pleased to break the quiet of my dream of day. Now, they have gone a-nest building.

Just to feel and to breathe, and to dream; and to find new emotions in the strangeness of new sounds! Mingled colors swim before me, swinging. Moving water, mist-hill, and changing sky. Broad rifts of light stream through the shadow of uneven trees, in their slow march up the hillside.

"And still a garden by the river blows."

WINDBELLS OF SUMMER

Was there ever a love dream that had not its garden of flowers!

My day garden rims the river where it meets the reflected blue of the skies. The pathways cross where hyacinth and mignonette mingle with colors of yellow and red. Their redolence gives back my youth, and I live those other summer days when like flowers listened to love whispers, as they bordered the edge of lover-lanes, in the heart's own highway of dreams.

Above my head a Windbell turns, and spins its bits of colored glass, on long threads. This senseless toy, fashioned in Japan, has a changeful tinkling that shapes my dreams. Its tintinnabulations hold the echoes of many bells. They drift about me,

Windblown from restless seas,
Windswept by restless seas.

There are dreams of half forgotten things, still treasured. The friends once made in

books, come out of buried years. In the fleeting turn of blue and green as the disc moves in the breeze, they come and go. They can not change for their only substance is my thought. Life sweeps by in flashes, and in the stillness come and go the shadow people of my books and dreams.

Lazily swinging, the river trail and the winding flower-bordered path swim before me. But the low symphonic tinkling lures me to those far-away lands I know so well, yet have never seen. In varying tone there runs a melody that tunes my heart.

The tinkling Windbell, that turns, and spins its bits of colored glass, on long threads.

In the discordant clash, resisting against the winds, I feel the inspiration that barbaric music lends. I am no longer annoyed by the sense of futility, nor wish to shape new harmonies. I do not deplore the fates' eternal adjustment. I am oblivious of a humanity that ever tries to create a new definition of happiness. In this moment of delicious comfort, the wind-bells jingle melodiously. To the sound of rushing waters, pageants fill my path of dreams. In phantasma,—

"Still lovely and still fugitive,"

they sweep across the waste of years. My swing is still.

There is the tinkle of cymbals, and the dancing maidens of Palestine move to and fro in the monotony of rhythm. That maiden, did you see her? In her great, deep eyes still lurks a wrong. But the grace of her body that holds you, this beauty of Palestine! There are long processions of priests,

who wear the robe of ephod, all of blue, and bells of gold, tinkling bells of gold. There is the echo of songs, and the feasts of Osiris have begun. The joyous worshipers of Cybèle pass by. In the folds of their garments, the color of blue and of gold, are bells that sound like ancient music in an ancient tongue, breathing hope and tremulous belief. It is the consonant of ages, that thrills me, as the harmony of a perfect chord.

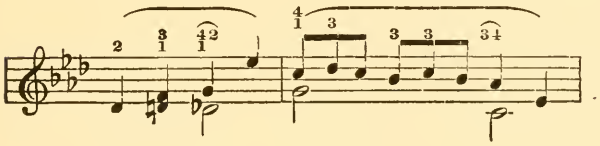
The spirit of bells unseen, unheard, that melts the discord in the human heart!

In the ringing clash resisting against the winds, is the soft falling music of reverberant glass.

In the slow, shadowy tinkle of a single moving disc, old stories, and phantom characters appear. Life seems but the drift of things repeated long before. My swing breathes with me. There is no mockery in the limpid wood-thrush song. The river

flashes out its continuous sheen. The flowers are bright in the last warmth of the sun. My heart lights up in the charm and the poetry of bells.

Can it be true that happiness escapes from the unmindful little things?
Just little spinning threads of tinkling glass!



II

II

IN the changing winds my bells are all a-clash. They fall in strange confusion. My vision of life becomes as fragmentary as shifting leaves from many forests. To my desolate heart, comes the quick, joyous notes in the wake of discord; it is like the ripple of laughing waters. Once more my swing is still, and I await the coming of my people of dreams. A soft falling echo is luring spirits of booklore to me.

Once upon a time, you know, there lived a fair princesse, who wore draped robes of white. Her lovely face was always veiled, quite hid from mortal view. Across the country wide she rode, to aid in kingly quest; on palfrey white, caparisoned with velvet, embroidered with gold, and soft fringes swept the ground. Her trappings held a tinkling music heard far away. Woe to the knave who lingered in the wayside when warned by the lilt of those silver bells. Perhaps she was the spirit of Goodness, and Purity, and Truth. Perhaps she was La Belle Dame sans Merci. She may be that

to you, and this to me, and we are thinking how she always inspired a lover-prince to

Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady on a white horse,

For,

With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall have music wherever she goes.

As my Faerie Queen smiles on her lover at the end of the story, and they go out of the pathway of dreams, a single strand of glass moves slow and musically. Doves croon in the branches about me. It is the hour of vespers, and there is the golden glory of the sinking sun. The perfume of flowers is an incense, and in the silence of sanctuaries, faces of women of sorrows haunt my dream.

"Some players upon plaintive strings,
Publish their wistfulness abroad;
I have not spoken of these things,
Save to one man and unto God."

My soul has long treasured the vision. A woman kneels with upturned face, and hands close pressed. Her eyes are deepened by the shadows, and filled with brimming tears. Her mouth is red and sweet. Her perfect, ringless fingers, hold a beaded chain. On each bead entwined, drops a glistening pearl,—a rosary of uncounted tears. The slow incantation of priests sings a monotone. I would not know her grief, for

"All sorrow ranks the same with God."

In this hour of prayer, she waits, and dares to hope. In the mystical silence,

"White incense from the altar breathes
Rich fragrance;
Or, flung from swinging censer, shrouds
The taper lights."

A note of music, and the host is raised. Her heart is blessed through all eternity. It is the moment

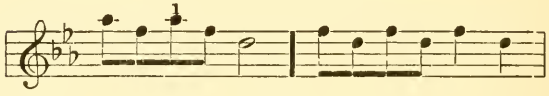
the stars sing in the heavens their song of human love.

Inconstant fancies come and go, as memory flings her shifting scenes.

Through my windbells, run soft melodies that become but echoes of sound.

Before me, lay uneven stretches of land. There are long, hot days, and nights that are filled with clear stars. On a western slope, a woman watches the sands of the hour-glass, while she waits for the moment when she will return to her child-hood home. I hear the incessant tinkle of sheep bells, across the dull blue waste, and I know that she who waits through the interminable hours, in unsleeping sorrow, is saved from the madness of the hills.

The faint, slow tinkle of broken glass!



III

III

WHAT legion of stories and odd superstitions might be culled from old chronicles! What traditions of bells if old castle walls could speak! Bells that inspire revenge, and bells that crush with fear! I hear them all in the echo of things!

Do you remember the Venus of Ille, a statue of bronze, who closed her finger upon the wedding ring, and who killed the life of a bride? For this sorcery she was cast into a bell, only to become a lasting haunting evil. For, says the mother who mourns the death of her son,—

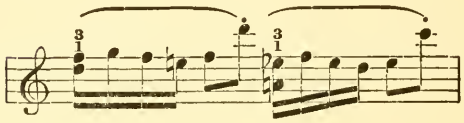
"Since that bell has rung at Ille, the vines have frozen twice!"

Now my windbells peal sardonic laughter. I hear the jingle of sleighbells.

Do you remember those bells that filled with

dread, and brought a murderer to feel the sense of crime to the depths of his stricken soul?

"What a tale their terror tells
Of despair!
How they clang, and clash, and roar!
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!"

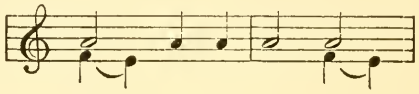


WINDBELLS OF SUMMER

In the quaint tales gathered from the dust webs of the Dark Ages, there is an old story, perhaps you may know, of the church bell of Falkenberg. This the mercenary Saxon ordered brought to him, that he might melt it into coin. The good but horrified bishop remonstrated in behalf of the silver bell for so long a part of his church, and dearly beloved. His timely plea cost him the ignominious experience of having the great bell tied around his neck, and both were cast into a dungeon well, six feet deep. When the despot bandit, Falkenstein, grew ill unto death of a bad conscience, the bishop's immortal soul sent the ominous measures from the depths of the earth. That this story is true, both doctor, and astrologer, who kept the death watch, agree: the deep tones chimed eternal damnation, the moment of his decease, at the bleak hour of midnight, upon the last fatal stroke of the hour-bell.

WINDBELLS OF SUMMER

As if in defiance of my mockery, the windbells over my head, echo in slow, lugubrious tones, like a muffled voice and a melancholy tale.



WINDBELLS OF SUMMER

When a child, no dreary sound held such indescribable terror, as the first solemn stroke of the village church bell sending a death warning to every home. Each repeated vibration, which swept the gloom of night, filled my child soul, with the questioning that has no answer. I am told that the custom of tolling, came of the belief in the power of bells to terrify the evil spirits lying in wait to grasp the souls of those who had died, and was known as the "passing bell."

When all the living things of night mingle with the gray shadows of trees and the death-bell tolls the "passing hour," even the live shadow-things stop and listen, and wait in the silence. Death comes unaware; we may not see, we may not hear, but the memory of that monotone follows us through the years, past the sloping hillside, calling us far from the gardens of dreams, and of visions.

There are echoes of odd superstitions, and old customs that hold charm and quaintness. Bells have been known to charm away pestilence; to allay a

stormy gale. Verily, who knows what hidden, subtle power lies in the "drowsy sequence," of the village bell,

"Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet,"

that calls to mass against our will, or secures the trust of childhood, or brings back the primal strength of an early religious faith.

Whatever is accordant or true responds to the vibration of bells. They are the tuning forks which set the human heart in harmony with the Infinite. They make us live again those best moments when we view the white feather on the plain, and God is clear

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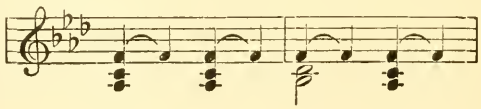
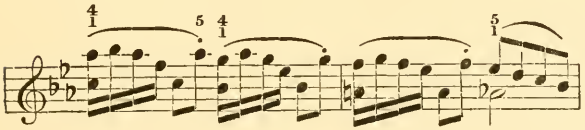
And swinging, I hear in the deepening twilight. slow tones of glass, broken and color-splashed!



IV

IV

OUT from the low eaves of my balcony, blue skies have turned to unfathomable grayness. From hidden nests, the birds fling out chirpings of forgotten gossip, at intervals, and then are still. I am alone with a thousand nestling things in shrub, and flower, and tree. The river is yet clear in the half-light, waiting to mirror the moon, as it rises from the gray mist cloud, fringed with trees; as it clears its way into the open blue, scattering the stars low to the world's rim.



My windbells of day have changed to carillons of night. They are sending their broken tones against the rising winds, through sibilant trees.

"I can not see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs."

In the stillness of evening, I hear only the echo of things. My people of dreams scurry away. I have but a glimpse of shadowy faces, and hear the light fall of twinkling feet, through the darkness. Only the echo of things!

There comes the echo of coast bells. It is the tocsin's sound, from the bell-tower on the seas, or, it is the bell-buoy, near the shore line, guarding against rocks and shoals. I hear the shrill bells of Louvain, summoning monks at scourging time. I hear the bells of Louvain. It is now the "passing bell," for a soldier's death, and a city's doom.

Again the trees whisper together, and the voices of many chimes, break in on the descending night. And the mingled color tones, falling upon the air,

chime the melody of the song.

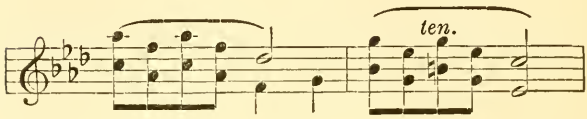
"He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps."

I see a youth in tattered garment, looking up, out of the shadows, singing the praises that spring from his heart. This hope is his soul's salvation.

I see the poor dreamer, Toby, trying to make some meaning out of the great shapes of bells in the gloom; but they remain shadowy, dark and dumb. Those wonder-tones that peopled the air for so long, so mysteriously, so often heard and never seen, so full of awesome melody, that would not let him rest. The poor dreamer, who expected to be beckoned by "something that was not a bell, and yet was what he had heard so often in the chimes, who, when he finally viewed her, "giddy, confused and out of breath looked about him vacantly, and sunk down in a swoon."

With the rush of summer winds, again I hear the echo of broken chimes, the chimes of Notre Dame, and see the monster face of Quasimodo, watching a

priest falling in slow torture, from high pinnacles; and I hear the sound of bells, high above the clouds, pealing forth a prayer of mercy for a damned soul.



"But whence, and whither fade away
Your echoes from our day?
You take our hearts with gentle pain,
Tremble, and pass again."

It is the echo of a sweeter chime that tolls in memory of a Quaker poet's death. The bells of St. Boniface, I hear ringing with tender cadence, because for many years a poet had loved their singing tones. Peace on earth, Goodwill to men, ring the Bells of St. Boniface, but the echo of their words is lost, only to you and to me, who dream.

Breathing the incense of half-closed petals, my senses are filled with vague, sweet dreams. Women of beauty, women of sorrow, and women of joy, bearing incense that has the perfume of lilies, of hyacinths, and of red roses, sweep by in long processions. I hear the drone of slow chants from behind closed doors. I hold my dreams of castles and tour-

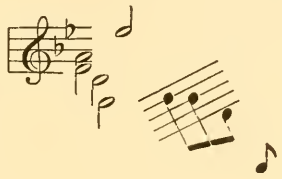
naments, and of gardens with high walls where Pierrots and Columbines play. I feel the stress of battles fought long ago, and now. I see the stark dead thing that was a mother's son, and hear the stifled cry of womankind. But, above it all, somewhere, near, and somewhere, far away, I hear always the silver throated bells, musically chiming the hours.

All come to me from the wide realm of dreams, in the faint sweet tinkle of broken glass, prismatic as life, moving in the clear air, with melody heard in dreams; There is the sound of temple bells, and bells of Mandelay; of bells that ring from the storm-stressed sea. Bells that have given their song to the wind and the water-brook which, in turn, have sent the tone across the sleeping fields, and through the somber forests, bearing on lofty breezes its heaven-drifted thought, for those who dream, that they may not lay up their treasures upon earth.

WINDBELLS OF SUMMER

Stopping as suddenly as broken thought, the music
of the windbells fall;
They fall in the rush of the wind.

I hear only the shivering sound of broken glass!



"Domes and towers and castles,
fancy builded,
There lie lost to daylight's garish
beams—
There lie hidden, till unveiled
and gilded,
Glory gilded, by my nightly
dreams!"

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WILD BELLS
OF SUMMER

Leone Scott